

The Pin-prick

BY MAY SINCLAIR



THAT? That's one of poor May Blissett's things, the one she used to say she'd leave me in her will, because, she said, she knew I'd be kind to it. Her reasons were always rather quaint. She spoke of it as if it were a live thing that could be hurt or made happy.

I've tried to be kind to it. I've framed it as it ought to be framed, and hung it in not too bad a light. I—I've consented to live with it.

You needn't look at it like that. Of course I know it isn't a bit alive in *our* sense. She couldn't draw, she could only paint a little; her inspiration was reminiscent, and she got hung more than once in the Academy. She was like so many of them. But she had a sense of beauty, of color, of decoration, and, at her best, a sort of magic queerness that was suggested irresistibly even when the things didn't quite come off.

That *this* hasn't come off—not quite—is really, to me, what makes it so poignantly alive. It's a bit of *her*, a little sensitive, palpitating shred, torn off from her and flung there—all that was left of her. It stands for her mystery, her queerness, her passionate persistence, and her pluck. To anybody who knew her the thing's excruciatingly alive.

It's so alive, so much *her*, that Frances Archdale wonders how I can bear to live with it, with the terrible reproach of it. She insisted that *we*—or, rather, that *she*—was responsible for what happened. But that's the sort of thing that Frances always did think.

Certainly she *was* responsible for May's coming here. She was with her when she was looking over the studio above mine, the one that Hanson had—it had been empty nearly a year—and she brought her in to me. I was to tell her whether the studio would do or not.

I think, when it came to the point, Frances wanted to saddle me with the responsibility. There were no other women in the studios—never had been; they're uncomfortable enough for a man who isn't fastidious; there's no service to speak of; and May Blissett purposed to live alone.

I looked at her and decided instantly that it wouldn't do. You had only to look at her to see that it wouldn't. She was small and presented what Frances called the illusion of fragility—an exquisite little person in spite of her queerness. She had one of those broad-browed, broad-cheeked, and suddenly pointed faces, with a rather prominent and intensely obstinate chin. The queerness was in her long eyes and in the way her delicate nose broadened at the nostrils and in the width of her fine mouth, so much too wide for the slenderly pointed face, and in the tiny scale of the whole phenomenon. She was swarthy, with lots of very dark, crinkly hair. There was something subtle about her, and something that I felt, God forgive me, as mysteriously and secretly malign.

Even if we had wanted women in the studios at all, I didn't want that woman. So I told her that it wouldn't do.

She looked at me straight with her long, sad eyes, and said: "But it's just what I'm hunting for. Why won't it do?"

I could have sworn that she knew what I was thinking.

I said there would be nobody to look after her. And Frances cut in, to my horror, "There would be *you*, Roly."

It was only one of her inconsiderate impulses, but it annoyed me and I turned on her. I said, "Has your friend seen that studio next to *yours*?" I knew that it was to let, and Frances knew that I knew. I suspected her of concealing its existence from May Blissett. She didn't want her near her; she didn't like the responsibility. I wished her to know

that it was her responsibility, not mine. I wasn't going to be saddled with it.

Her face—the furtive guilt of it—confirmed my suspicion as we stared at each other across the embarrassment we had created. I ought to have been sorry for Frances. She was mutely imploring me to get her out of it, to see her through. And I wasn't going to.

And then May Blissett laughed, an odd little soft laugh that suggested some gentle but diabolic appreciation of our agony.

"That wouldn't do."

I was remorseless and said in my turn: "Why wouldn't it? You'd be near Miss Archdale."

She said: "We don't either of us want to be so near. We should get in each other's way most horribly—just *because* we like each other. I shouldn't be in your way, Mr. Simpson."

She was still exquisite, but at the same time a little sinister.

I remember trying to say something about the inference not being very flattering, but Frances got in first.

"She doesn't mean that she doesn't like you, Roly. What she means is—"

"What I mean is that, as Frances knows me and likes me a little—you *said* you did"—(It was as if she thought that Frances was going to say she didn't. She flung her a look that was not sinister, not sinister at all—purely exquisite—exquisitely incredulous, exquisitely shy. And she went on with her explanation)—"I should be on her mind. And I couldn't be on *your* mind, you know."

I said, "Oh, *couldn't* you?"

But she took no notice. She said, "No, if I come here—and I'm coming"—(She got up to go. She was absolutely determined, absolutely final)—"we must make a compact never"—(she was most impressive)—"never to get in each other's way. It's no use for Frances and me to make a compact. We couldn't keep it for five minutes."

She had the air, under all her incredulity, of paying high tribute to their mutual affection.

"I'm coming here to work, and I want to be alone. What's more, I want to feel alone."

"And you think," I said, "I'll make you feel it?"

She said, "I hope so."

She had put herself between Frances and the door. She said: "You'd better stay and explain it if he doesn't understand. I'm going."

She went like a shot, and I gathered that her precipitance was to give me the measure of her capacity for withdrawal.

Frances stayed. I could see her stiffening herself to meet my wrath.

"Frances," I said, "how *could* you?"

Frances was humble and deprecating—for her. She said, "Roly, she really won't be in your way."

"She *will* be in it," I said, "most abominably. You know we're not supposed to have women here."

"I know; but she's not like a woman. She was trying to tell you that she wasn't. She isn't. She isn't—really—quite human. You won't have to do any of the usual things."

I asked her what she meant by the usual things, and she became instantly luminous. She said, "Well—she won't expect you to fall in love with her."

I'm afraid I said, Heaven only knew what she'd expect. But Frances walked over me with "And *you* needn't expect *her* to fall in with you."

And she put it to me, if there'd been a chance of that sort of thing happening, if May had been dangerous, would she have risked it? (We were engaged in those days.) Would she have gone out of her way to plant her up there over my head? Would she have asked me to look after her if she had—well—required looking after? And she reminded me that she wasn't a fool.

As for May, that sort of thing was beyond her.

"Is it," I said, "beyond any woman? I wouldn't put it—"

"Past her?" she snatched me up. "Perhaps not. But she's past it. Gone through it all, my dear. She's utterly beyond. Immune."

I said: "Never. A face with that expression—that half-malign subtlety. She might do things."

And Frances turned on me. You know how she can turn. Malign subtlety! Malign suffering. The malignity was not in the things she'd do, poor lamb, but in the things that had been done to her. And then she sat down and

told me a few of them—told me what, in fact, May had gone through.

First of all, she had lost all her people—father, mother, brothers, and sisters. (She was the youngest of a large family.) That was years and years ago, and she was only thirty-two now, so you may judge the frantic pace of the havoc. And by way of pretty interlude her father had gone mad—mad as a hatter. May had looked after him. Then they lost all their money. (That was a mere detail.) Then she married a man who left her for another woman. Left her with a six-months'-old baby to bring up. Then the child died and she divorced him—he dragged her through horrors. Then, as if that wasn't enough, her lover—I beg her pardon, the man who loved her—was drowned before her eyes in a boating accident. Nothing, Frances said, had happened since then. What could, when everything had happened? As for doing things, there was nothing poor May wanted to do except pictures. And if she thought she could do them better here over my head, wouldn't I be a brute to try and stop her?

Of course I said I shouldn't dream of stopping her, and that it was very sad—it was, indeed, appalling. But it seemed to me that, though Frances had let out so much, she was still keeping something back. And a brutal instinct made me say to her:

"What is it, then, that you dislike so much in her?"

She took it quite simply, as if she had been prepared for it. She even smiled as she answered: "Nothing—except her obstinacy."

I asked her, Wouldn't that be precisely what would get in my way?

And she said, No; May's obstinacy would consist in keeping out of it.

Still, I objected, obstinate people were nearly always tactless.

And Frances said, No, not always. She said—dear Frances!—"I'm not obstinate. But I'm tactless, if you like. Look at the horrid mess I got us both into just now. And look how she got us out. She saved us."

I admitted that she had.

And Frances finished up, triumphantly: "Can't you trust her? Can't you see that she's beyond? That she really

won't be there? There never was a more effaced and self-effacing person, a person more completely self-contained. I assure you none of us exist for her. So she needn't, really, be on your mind."

And she wasn't, not for a moment, from the day of her coming till the day—Though I must say, afterward—

To begin with, she chose a week-end for her installation—a Friday till Tuesday when I was away. I literally didn't know that she was there, so secret and so silent was she in her movements overhead. I couldn't have believed it possible for a woman to be so effacing and effaced. It was super-feminine; it was, as Frances said, hardly human. And yet she didn't overdo it. I had to own that the most exquisite thing about this exquisite and queer little person was her tact. By overdoing it the least bit, by insisting on her detachment, her isolation, she would have made us disagreeably aware. When you met her on the stairs (she used to run up and down them incredibly soft-footed) she smiled and nodded at you (she had really a singularly intriguing smile) as much as to say that she was in an awful hurry, life being so full of work, of a joyous activity, but still it was lucky that we could meet like this, sometimes, on the stairs.

And she used to come in to tea, sometimes, when I had a party. She took hardly any room in the studio, and hardly any part in the conversation, but she would smile prettily when you spoke to her; the implication being that it made her happy to be asked to tea, but it was not so necessary to her happiness that you would have to ask her often. She used to come a little late and go a little early—and yet not too early—on the plea (it sounded somehow preposterous) that she was busy. Even the poor art that kept her so was tactful. It had no embarrassing pretensions, it called for no criticism, you could look at it without sacrificing your sincerity to your politeness. And if it hadn't been, May was too well-bred ever to refer to it. And it kept her. It got itself hung, as I've said, now and again. Supremely tactful, it spared your pity.

In short, she made no claim on us, unless, indeed, her courage called to us to admire the spectacle it was.

For, when you think of the horrible things that had happened to her, the wonder was how she ever contrived to smile at all. But that was what she had effaced more than anything—the long trail of her tragedy. Her reticence was inspired by the purest, the most delicate sense of honor. It was as if she felt that it wouldn't be playing the game, the high game of life, to appeal to us on that ground, when we couldn't have resisted. Besides, it would have hurt, and she wouldn't for the world have hurt us. Her subtlety, you see, was anything but malign. It was beneficent, tender, supernaturally lucid. It allowed for every motive, every shade. And we took her as she presented herself—detached, impersonal, and, as Frances said, immune.

I said to Frances: "We needn't have worried. You were right."

And Frances exulted: "Didn't I tell you? She's quite kind to us, but she doesn't want us."

She had made us forget that we hadn't wanted her.

She had made me forget that I had ever said she'd do things. Even now I don't know what on earth it was I thought she'd do.

She had been living up in that studio, I think, three years before it happened.

I can tell you just how it was. On the evening, rather late, Frances came to see me. She asked me if I'd seen anything of May Blissett lately.

I said: No. Had she?

And she said, Yes, May had called that afternoon.

I noticed something funny about Frances's face—something that made me say, "And you weren't very glad to see her?"

She asked me how I knew she wasn't, and I told her that her funny face betrayed her.

Then, by way of extenuation, she told me the tale of May's calling. I remember every word of it, because we went, she and I—she made me go over it again and again—afterward. She told me that she was not really at home that afternoon to anybody but Daisy Valentine. Daisy had got something on her mind that she wanted to talk about. I knew what those two were when they got together—they were as thick as

thieves. And as I also knew that the something on Daisy's mind was Reggie Cotterill, I understood that their communion would be private and intimate to the last degree.

And it seemed that the servant had blundered and let May Blissett in upon the mysteries before they had well begun, and that she'd stayed interminably. There they were, the two of them, snuggled together on the sofa; their very attitude must have shown May what Daisy was there for. They were just waiting for tea to come before they settled down to it. Poor Daisy was quivering visibly with the things she'd got to say. Couldn't I see her? I could. I gathered that the atmosphere was fairly tingling with suppressed confidence, and that May, obtuse to these vibrations, sat there and simply wouldn't go.

I remember I suggested that she, too, might have had something on her mind and have had things to say. But Frances said: No, she never had things. She'd come for nothing—nothing in the world. She was in one of her silences, those fits which gave her so often the appearance of stupidity. (I knew them. They were formidable, exasperating; for you never could tell what she might be thinking of; and she had a way of smiling through them, a way that we knew now was all part of her high courage, of the web she had spun, that illusion of happiness she had covered herself up in, to spare us.) Frances said she wouldn't have minded May's immobility for herself. It was Daisy who sat palpitating with anxiety, wondering why on earth she didn't go.

I wondered, too. It was so unlike her. I said so.

And Frances, who seemed to understand May through and through, said it wasn't. It was most characteristic. It was just May's obstinacy. If May had made up her mind to do a thing she did it *quand même*. Generally she made up her mind not to be a nuisance. She'd made it up that afternoon that she'd stay, and so she stayed.

"I'm afraid," Frances said, "we weren't very nice to her. We let her see we didn't want her."

"And then?" I asked.

"Oh, then, of course, she went."

I must say I marveled at the obstinacy that could override a delicacy so consummate as May Blissett's. And I thought that Frances's imagination must have been playing her tricks. It did sometimes.

That night, about nine o'clock, I ran up to May Blissett's studio. I knocked at her door three or four times. I knew she was there. I'd heard her come in an hour or two before. Then, remembering our compact, I went away, going rather slowly, in the hope that she'd relent. I can't tell you whether I really heard her open her door and come out on to the stair-head after I'd got down to my own floor; whether I really thought that she leaned out over the banister to see what was there; or whether I tortured myself with the mere possibility—afterward.

It must have been about six o'clock in the morning when they came to me, the hall porter and his son. They told me that Miss Blissett was not in her room and that they couldn't get her studio door open. It wasn't locked, they said; it had given slightly, but it seemed stuck all over, and an uncommonly queer smell was coming through. They thought it was some sort of disinfectant.

I went up with them. You could smell the disinfectant oozing steadily through a chink in the studio door. We opened the big French windows opposite, and the windows of the bedroom and the stairs outside. Then we began to get the door open with knives, cutting through the paper that sealed it up inside. The reek of the sulphur was so strong that I sent the men out to open the studio windows—they were sealed up, too—from the outside, before we finished with the door. One of them came back and told me not to go into the room.

But when the smoke cleared a little I went.

Oh, it was all quite decent. Trust her for that. She was lying on the couch which she'd dragged into the middle of the great bare studio, all ready, dressed in her nightgown, with a sheet drawn up to her chin. The whole place was dim with the fog of the sulphur still burning. She had set the candles, one on each side, one at the head, and one at the foot.

No, there's nothing stately and cere-

monial about a sulphur candle. Have you ever seen one? It's a little fat yellow devil that squats in a saucer. There's a crimson ooze from it when it burns, as if the thing sweated blood before it began its work. One of those stinking devils would have done what she wanted, and there were four. Can't you see her going softly round the couch in her white nightgown, lighting her candles, smiling her subtle and mysterious smile? The ghost of it was still there. I am sure she was thinking how beautifully she had managed and how she had saved us all. The dear woman couldn't have had any other thought.

Even Frances saw that.

Frances nearly went off her head about it. Just as she did afterward about poor Dickinson. She declared that we, or rather she, was responsible. She'd had a letter from May Blissett written that night.

It's stuck in my head ever since (it wasn't long). "Forgive me for stopping on like that. It was very thick-skinned of me when I saw you so dear and happy there together. But somehow I couldn't help it. And you *have* forgiven me."

A perfectly sane letter. Not a word about what she meant to do. Evidently she didn't want Frances to connect it with their reception of her.

But of course she did. She insisted that if she had only sent Daisy Valentine away and kept May, May would have been living and happy now. She had shown her that they hadn't wanted her, that she was in their way, and May had just gone and taken herself, once for all, out of it. In the sight of God she—she had killed May.

I couldn't do anything with her. I couldn't make her see that the two things couldn't have had anything in the world to do with each other; that the affair of the visit, to May—after what she'd been through—would be a mere pin-prick; that you don't go through such things to be killed by a pin-prick.

But Frances would have it that you do; that it was because of what May had been through that she was so vulnerable.

Besides, she maintained that her responsibility went deeper and further back. It was that from the first she had

been afraid of May Blissett—afraid of something about her. No, not her queerness: her loneliness. She had been afraid that it would cling, that it would get in her way. She had compelled her to suppress it. She had driven it in, and the thing was poisonous. I reminded her that May didn't want us, and she wailed:

"We tried to make ourselves think she didn't. But she did. She did. She wanted us most awfully all the time."

If she had only known! And so on. I did all I could. I pointed out to her that poor May was insane. What she

did proved it. In her right mind she would never have done it. She would have been incapable of that cruelty to us who cared for her. But Frances stuck to it that that was just it. She wouldn't have done it if she'd known we did care. It was the very essence of her despair that she had thought we didn't.

And sometimes I wonder whether Frances wasn't right. Whether, if I had run back that night and caught May Blissett on the staircase—

But, you see, I wasn't really sure that she was there. I mean, she may have lit her candles before that.

The Service

BY BURGESS JOHNSON

I WAS the third man running in a race,
And memory still must run it o'er and o'er:
The pounding heart that beat against my frame;
The wind that dried the sweat upon my face
And turned my throat to paper creased and sore;
The jabbing pain that sharply went and came.

My eyes saw nothing save a strip of road
That flaunted there behind the second man;
It swam and blurred, yet still it lay before.
My legs seemed none of mine, but rhythmic strode
Unconscious of my will that urged, "You can!"
And cried at them to make one effort more.

Then suddenly there broke a wave of sound,—
Crowds shouting when the first man struck the tape;
And then the second roused that friendly din;
While I—I stumbled forward and the ground
All wavered 'neath my feet, while men agape,
But silent, saw me as I staggered in.

As sick in heart and flesh I bent my head,
Two seized me and embraced me, and one cried,
"Your thudding footsteps held me to the grind."
And then the winner, smiling wanly, said,
"No dream of records kept me to my stride—
I dreaded you two thundering behind!"

THE BAMBINO

NO. That isn't mine. It's a thing of Frances Archdale's, her sister-in-law, Mrs. Jack Archdale. You know the man I mean. He buys pictures.

You think it's odd he didn't buy this one? Wait till you've heard the story.

I've seen her sitting like that, like a Flemish Madonna: sloping knees, and the naked slip of the child standing between her hands; her hands half holding, half adoring. He must have seen her—and her hands. They're in the centre of the picture, large and white and important; as if Frances had known.

You'd have thought it wasn't possible to hate a woman so unfortunate as she was. She ought to have been immune. Yet I believe I'd have hated her even if she hadn't smashed that incomparable old Chinese bowl poor Lawrence left me. But no doubt that began it: the sight of the precious thing slipping through those large awkward hands that were always in movement, always seizing and dropping things, the long fingers splaying; and her husky drawl: "I'm so sor-ry, Mr. Simp-son." She sent me a blue and white bowl from Liberty's the next day, and seemed to think that, if anything, that left me in her debt.

On the whole, she was let off easily, because, with all her multiplied misfortunes, she never faced the full implications of disaster. She was too complacent.

I remember the season when Jack Archdale brought her to town and we all raved about her, his slender Flemish Madonna, with her long, slender shoulders, her long, slender, skim-milk face, her long, slender nose that overhung her upper lip that overhung the lower one that overhung the soft round of her chin sloping away into her neck. And the thin gold rain of hair on her cheeks, loosened from the two sleek bands, untidily. There was something so helplessly yielding and retreating about that profile that you weren't prepared for her obstinacy, that obstinacy which—

Well, it was the helplessness that caught Jack Archdale.

The first time I saw her, at their house-warming, she was unfortunate; standing on a priceless Persian rug and pouring claret-cup over it from the glass she tilted, following Archdale with her pale, moony eyes. Her name was Adela.

He adored her in a funny, abject way, sitting dumb (you couldn't talk to Adela) and staring at her. When the baby came he adored the baby; they both adored it, and they were both jealous of the adoration. You'd come in and find them quarrelling about which was to hold it. He'd be saying, "Give him to me. I want him." And she, with her queer drawl, "You might let me have him, Jack. He's more mine than yours."

And he'd shout back at her, "He isn't." Not ragging, you know, but quite fierce and serious.

He talked about the Bambino half the time; he'd bring the conversation round to him from anywhere. I remember dining with them one night before they left London. (They were always asking me because of Frances.) He'd bought a picture of mine that

year and he thought it funny to say, "Roly doesn't come to see us, he comes to see his old picture."

She sat there, stretching her white goose neck to get out her drawl. "Aren't you aw-w-fully glad when peo-ple buy your pictures?"

He tried to head her off. "He isn't. He feels as I should if somebody bought the Bambino."

And she went blundering on. "He knows it's safe with us. He knows it's all in the family."

I said he didn't know anything of the sort. Frances had checked me the week before, and I was still bitter about it and afraid of Adela because she had an unpleasant way of throwing Frances at me. (You summed up Adela when you said she had no tact.) I could see Archdale making signs to her, but she did it again with her lazy air of not being able to help it.

"What are you going to do with yourself this winter?" The poor woman couldn't see she hadn't changed the subject. She was like that.

In the smoke-room he worked round to his subject again. I'd asked him how he liked his country house, and he said, "It'll be a jolly place for the Bambino to grow up in. And to step into when I'm dead."

"It's all very well," he said. "He's delicious to kiss and all that, and he'll never be prettier than he is now. But I wish one could skip fifteen years or so. I want the Bambino grown up, now. I can't wait twenty years to know what he's going to do, the sort of things he'll say, what his mind'll be like. He's got no end of a mind, Roly, already. At thirteen months. You wouldn't believe it."

"Women are funny," he said. "Adela doesn't want him to grow up. She'd keep him a Bambino always if she had her way."

I can see him with that queer, ironic face of his, gripping his old briar pipe with his teeth while he smiled, thinking of the things the Bambino would do when he grew up.

It was five years before I got the rest of the story; and what I couldn't make out, what I couldn't even have tried to get from either of them, Frances told me.

I'd lost sight of them somehow all that time; then one day I met Jack Archdale at Frances's, and he motored us both down to that place of theirs in Buckinghamshire. I can't say I enjoyed the run. Archdale was a sulky, nervous driver. He stopped dead to change his gear, and he took his corners badly. That wasn't like him; he used to be so cool and careful and efficient, and I remember wondering why on earth he was so jumpy and why he sulked so now. He didn't even rise when I asked after the blessed Bambino.

And we weren't in his house five minutes before he let us see that he'd grown a temper. He hadn't the ghost of one to start with; that I can swear to. I supposed it was the fruit of seven years' marriage with a goose-faced Madonna.

She hadn't changed, except that she seemed much more glad to see us than she used to be; so glad, in fact, that it struck me she was positively afraid to be left alone with Archdale and his temper.

I expected every minute that he'd say, "Where's the Bambino?" I said it myself at last, to create a diversion.

Adela seemed gratified, and went out to get him, and Archdale got up and stood by the window with his back to us, pretending to stare at things in his garden. Frances looked round at him uneasily, and I supposed then that he and Adela had quarrelled about the kiddy. It was what they would do. I began to long for the Bambino to appear and break the tension. I think I expected an excited, dramatic entry; I reminded myself that the Bambino was now five years old.

So I wasn't prepared to see Adela come back with a baby in her arms—a baby too young to display excitement, too young to talk. It could only make queer, immature noises.

I said: "What? A new Bambino? And you never told me!"

Adela was smiling stupidly, and Archdale kept his station by the window. The new baby looked as if it didn't see any of us. There was something odd, something morbid about its detachment, and I touched its soft magnolia cheek to feel if it were real.

"I can see it's new," I said, "but— isn't it awfully like the old Bambino?"

"It is the old Bambino. There isn't any other."

She put it to the ground. Then I saw.

She had got her way. The Bambino would be a baby all its life. Its mind had stopped dead at fourteen months.

Archdale turned, as if he had got up courage at last to stand with her and see her through. He had braced himself to look at the Bambino.

It couldn't walk; it sort of toddled, with a series of little headlong, shambling rushes, wagging its head till the heavy, bulging forehead swung forward and upset its balance. It hadn't sense to grab at things and save itself.

When it fell Archdale rushed to it with a sudden gasping cry. He held it up in his arms, turning with it to Frances and me sternly, as if he defied us to see anything in it but its beauty.

Oh, yes, it was beautiful. It isn't true that idiots always have vacant faces. The Bambino's face was full, full of a heavy, sleeping mournfulness—mournfulness carved into the exquisite, morbid bow of his little mouth, into the straight, pure line of his nose, and fixed in his black, drowsy eyes. But an unutterable, not human, mournfulness, without any reminiscence or foreboding. Animal—the unmoving sadness of a cat's eyes would be near it, only that has something human in it.

Adela began talking. "He is a little backward. But I tell Jack it's because his mind's too big for his body. He's going to be something wonderful. You've only got to look at his face to see he's thinking." She really thought that.

I believe even Jack thought then it wasn't quite hopeless. He had theories; tried experiments; took infinite precautions. He had the nurseries moved to the ground floor so that Adela shouldn't carry him up and down stairs, and a gate put at the bottom of the stairs so that he shouldn't crawl up and fall down them. The day nursery was hung with glittering balls, and glass prisms that shook in the sun and sent rainbow patches darting about the walls and ceiling.

And there was a peal of bells he used to ring. He thought if you could once catch the Bambino's attention you might draw his mind out of its hiding-place. They gave him yards and yards of paper ribbons, pink and green and blue, to play with. The Bambino had dark days when he sat on his big mackintosh mattress like a porcelain idol, doing nothing but wag his head. And he had bright days when he seized the paper ribbons and tore them to bits. And days of surpassing brilliance when he shambled along the garden walks and tore down Jack's delphiniums and gladioli from their borders. His progress was marked by a trail of decaying red and scarlet spears.

Frances told me how it happened. Yes; it was Adela; Adela's hands that couldn't hold things; Adela's obstinacy. He had told her not to carry the Bambino up and down stairs. So she did it. The hall stairs were very long and steep, very narrow at the turn. She was coming down them with the Bambino on one arm and the tail of her gown on the other. He caught sight of Archdale in the hall, and was struggling to get to him . . .

Adela doesn't see the connection between that fall and his "backwardness." She doesn't see yet what's happening to Archdale. She doesn't see why they have separate rooms. Nor why he was terrified the other night when she came in with the big lamp in her hands flaring. He jumped up and took it from her, and she stood there splaying her hands and smiling while he growled at her: "You—"

He didn't say it. It was the one word his mind shied at, the word you hoped he'd never have to hear. If you'll believe me, she positively shrieked it. "Really, Jack, anybody'd think I was an idiot!"

He looked at her, and Frances and I looked at each other. We'd both seen the same thing, only I didn't know what it was till Frances told me.

"He can't help it," she said. "He's afraid of everything . . . She wants to have more babies, and he won't let her. He simply couldn't stand seeing her hold them."

I said it was rather cruel; and Frances said, "Oh yes, cruel. That's the awful thing, how it's changed him."

I suggested that it hadn't changed Adela, and she put it to me. "Could I see anything changing Adela?"

I couldn't. After all I was sorrier for him, and I said so. I knew Frances didn't like Adela.

But she shook her head, and said, "I'm not sure. He knows the worst and she doesn't. It'll be awful when she sees it. She can't go on pretending when the Bambino . . . Besides, she may have to see what you've seen."

"And that is—?"

She stuck it straight in front of me. "Why, that he hates her."

I suppose that's what I saw.

I wish Frances would take the damned thing away. But she's afraid of it. She's got in too much: the sweet, milk-white, fatuous beauty. And the hands, the terrible, imbecile hands; the insecurity.

MAY SINCLAIR.